



---

## Religious Practices among a Nomadic Community: Raika

Pragya Sharma

---

**Abstract:** Raikas are the largest group of nomadic pastoralists of India. Each year after the rains, hundreds and thousands of shepherds embark in collective camps on migratory journeys that can span distances of up to 1200 KMs and last up to nine months. Employing ethnographic research approach, ten migratory flocks and 45 sedentary families have been studied through descriptive research design to understand the religious and cultural practices of Raikas during their sedentary as well as migratory part of life of Raikas. Fieldwork has been done in two villages predominantly inhabited by Raikas: Raika Ki Dhani and Manpur Bakdi in Pali Sirohi Belt.

**Keywords:** Nomads, Pastoralists, Community Belief, Cultural Traditions.

---

### Introduction

Raikas are a major pastoral community of Rajasthan who wander from one place to another in search of pastures. Earlier they used to rear only camels but nowadays they have also started herding other animals like sheep and goats. But still camels hold a very prominent place in their lifeworld. Raikas lead both sedentary as well as migratory life. For eight to ten months they are on migration after rains and remaining time they lead sedentary life in villages. Normally they reside in dhani (outside of village). When they are on migration, care of the household, children and elderly is taken by Raika females. During the sedentary part they move collectively in deras. As a wandering people, the Raikas lead a life full of hardships and worries. Their first and foremost concern is that of earning their livelihood. Nomadic movements in the usually unsafe and dirty countryside continuously expose their life to dangers of accidents like snake-bite, attack by wild animals, theft, disease, death, drought, loss of animals etc. During migration, they have to move through lonely routes in jungles and solitary areas and during the sedentary part also, they live outside the villages, which creates constant threat to their safety and well being. Thus, their life is full of hardships and challenges. To prevent and to face these challenges for their existence, they believe in the invisible and mysterious powers and seek their help through religious rituals. Such beliefs, rituals and practices constitute their religion. Raikas are culturally and educationally backward people and they take religion as a matter of fear or faith. We shall be able to understand their concept of religion if we go into their beliefs, festivities and other rituals, which they perform to interact with the supernatural.

### Belief and Interpretation of Dreams

Religion has since long been a matter of great interest both to the layman and the social scientist. It has been defined in several ways. But Grafton's (1945) definition of religion seems to be widely acceptable from a sociological point of view: it is the interaction of living personalities with symbols of assumed supernatural social objects. Belief system is defined as an organized body of ideas, attitudes and convictions centered around values or things regarded as important or precious by a group (Pokarna 1994). Raikas believe in

dreams, they believe that dreams are excellent indicators of one's future. They are scared of bad dreams and are happy over good dreams. Some of the interpretations given by respondents about dreams are as follows:

A man seeing a beggar:	Possibility of theft or economic loss.
Birth of a calf to one's cow:	Economic prosperity ahead.
Black and dirty clothes:	Ill luck ahead.
Seeing children with moustaches and beards:	Loss or somebody's death in the family.
Participating in a feast in a dream:	Economic loss.
Seeing a peacock:	Good luck ahead.
Seeing god Ramdeoiji or Pabuji:	Possibility of childbirth or economic gain
Seeing Hanumanji:	Possibility of some disease.
If a dreamer sees himself blind:	Death of some close relative.

## Festivals

Raikas are basically Hindus and thus they celebrate almost all the festivals celebrated by Hindus in general. The cycle of their important festivals is as follows:

Months	Festival	Deities worshipped
Chaitra (March-April)	Basoda and Sheel Saton	Sheetla Mata
Vaishakh (April-May) (May-June)	Akha Teej	
Sawan (July-Aug.)	Teej	Mamai Mata
Bhadon (Aug.-Sept.)	Krishna Janmashtami Goga Navami	Lord Krishna Gogaji
Asoj (Sept.-Oct.)	Kanagat Dashehra	Ancestors and departed souls Rawana is burnt
Kartik (Oct.-Nov.)	Nortriya Diwali	Maa Durga Laxmi ji & Ganesh ji
Posh (Dec.-Jan.)	Makar Sankranti	
Magh (Jan.-Feb.)	Basant Panchami	
Fagun (Feb.-March)	Shivratri Holi	Lord Shiva

Raikas do not celebrate these festivals on the same day, as other Hindus celebrate. They only proclaim that they celebrate these festivals, but in reality these festivals are not celebrated in the same way as mainstream Hindus in general do. For example, they do not celebrate *shraddha*. Crooke (1975) has, however, written that, Raikas observe *shraddha* and sometimes, if affordable, go to Gaya for performing last rituals for the dead and departed. Main religious festival of Raika is Akha Teej, which occurs in April. It is considered the most important day for marriage. Most of the betrothals and mass marriages take place on this day. They consider this day as an *abujh sava* (which means no consultation with the *pandit* for an auspicious occasion). During this festival, Nambardars invite five or six important people from the village to share a special meal. The New Year of Raikas begins with Akha Teej (as the third day of the bright half of the month of Baisakh). Among the Raikas, festivals and community functions occupy a special significance. They maintain the feeling of oneness in the tribe. These community gatherings are encouraged by traditions and they also serve as a means of recreation and enjoyment. In contrast to modernization, fairs and festivals hold an important place and charm for the tradition-bound Raikas. They enjoy *parva* (festivals) and *mello* (fair). The celebration of *Navratra* (Nortriya) festival is held from the first to the ninth day in the

eight days of Asoj. They do fast on these days and generally, it is performed collectively. Fifteen or twenty days before *Navratra* they assemble and decide whether they have to take *Navratra* fast or not. It is not necessary that every Raika has to do *Navratra*. In the hamlet each family has to contribute some money towards the expenses of the festival. No celebration is done on the day of Dussehra. It is believed that the demon king of Lanka, Rawana was killed on this day. *Dhan Teras* is celebrated on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of Kartika. It is believed that some new utensils should be purchased and brought home on this day. Deepawali (Diwali) is celebrated with full enjoyment. It is the festival of lights. Laxmiji is worshiped on this day. *Puree, dana* and *lapsi* is cooked and served in each home. Candles or *diya* are lit and decorated around the house. Similarly Holi is celebrated with great joy and funfare and colours are thrown on each other. Raikas dance on the beat of drum, in the evening Holi is burnt. For certain purposes, then, Raikas act as intermediaries between men and sacred powers in the kind of non-Brahmin priesthood, often practiced by so called lower-caste 'priests' such as Jogis or Atits. Their link to the sacred powers is even clearer when we consider Holi. Mer highlanders light their Holi (bonfire), after that of the Raikas at the Kanmeranes in the Barda hills, because they believe that the Raikas Holi is lit and attended by the spirits of the great religious souls of Vedic and Puranic times. This belief makes the Holi of the Raikas sacred; so much so, that people from distant villages watch from higher spots for a glimpse of the Holi to light their own. (Lachye 1997)

### Deities Worshiped by Raikas

**Gugaji or Gogaji:** Gugaji Chauhan is a deified hero of Rajasthan. He was probably born in the eleventh century. He is said to be the god of snakes. It is believed that he had full command over snakes, so his name is associated with snake worship in Rajasthan. Although no historical evidence is available, a Rajasthani historian Pt. Jhabar Mal Sharma, has written that he was the ruler of Dadera and he fought with Abubark, the chieftain of the emperor Firoz Tuglak's forces. He married Kelanji Rathore. As a cure of snakebite, his name is remembered by all villagers along with Rebaris (Sharma 1957). The shrine of Gogaji is at the village Maidee in the Nohar Tehsil where a big cattle fair is organized on the Krishna Navmi of the month of Bhadon (August). Raikas also attend this fair whenever possible. They also worship Gogaji on this day. On this day, *poori, mithai and gulgulas* are cooked. It is called *Guga ri rasoi*. (Kitchen of Gogaji).

One interesting thing has been observed in the celebration of Goga Navmi. As among other so-called higher castes, during worship of Gugaji, Raikas do *agyari*, in which a morsel of food is offered on some burning coal or in the fire burning in their *chullha* (kitchen stove). It is a belief among them, that by observing Goga Navmi in this manner, they are prevented from possible snakebite. Raikas also sing prayers and songs on several themes related to the events of Goga's life. Unlike other deities worshipped by them, no specific idol or figure of Gogaji is popular among Raikas. They just put on the locket bearing the image of one or more snakes. It can be said that some traditions of so-called higher castes have influenced their religion and their pattern of worship. It may be because they believe that by doing so (like *agyari* in this case) they can move a step forward, up in the ladder of caste hierarchy.

**Pabuji:** Pabuji is the main deity of Raikas and is central to Raika religious system all over Rajasthan and regarded as an incarnation of Lakshamanji. Pabuji temples are found in Raika hamlets. If a new Raika hamlet is founded, its inhabitants raise money to construct Pabuji's temple, and if they are short of resources, they at least build a platform with a stone tablet showing Pabuji on his divine mare, Kesar Kamli. Pabuji is always

with his elder brother's son, Rupnathji (also called Jharuaji), who later, as the story tells us, avenges his death. Rupnathji's stone tablet is smaller and placed on Pabuji's left and worshipped next to Pabuji. Sometimes, a stone tablet has Pabuji in the courtiers with his other courtiers-Dheboji, Chandoji, Salji Solanki and Harmal Raika seated in four corners. Generally, Rupnathji and Pabuji are not included in the same slab. Raikas perform *mannat* of Pabuji for the accomplishment of a task and if that task is accomplished they organize overnight singing of prayers in which Nayak Bhopas are invited to sing Pabuji's life history. There are also Raika men who specialize in nightlong singing of Pabuji's life episodes. This type of singing is called *jhurava*. Such a singing is different from Nayak Bhopa's performance because here neither the cloth painting *phad* nor musical instruments are used. *Jhurava* session is organized with money collected from the community.

The story of Pabuji is divided into twelve sections (*parvara*) and each of its singers adds some more to it (Agarwal, 1964). The section on the story of she-camels is of particular interest to the Raikas. Hero of this section is Harmal Raika who goes to Lanka in the disguise of an ascetic to collect information on the exact place where the camel-herds rested. He is worshipped along with Pabuji and Rupnathji. Apart from the temple in Raika hamlets, a temple of Pabuji is also at village Kolu, in Jodhpur. No cattle fair or any other fair in general is organized at the shrine. The story of Pabuji on which they believe and which is quite famous among them is as follows:

Pabuji was the defied hero of Marwar. He fought against his sister's husband Jin Raj Kichi to save the cows of a Charan woman, Deval, from being snatched away by him. From her, he got her wonderful mare, known as Kesar Kalmi, on the promise to help her whenever needed, Jin Raj Khichi again came to snatch her cows. Once, Pabuji went to Umarkot to marry Sodi, the daughter of Suraj Mal. He had taken only three *pheras* (nuptial rounds) when his mare showed restlessness, which was a symbol that Jin Raj Khichi had gone to harass Deval. So having left the nuptial rounds then and there and having given his *katar* (dagger) to his wife to complete her *pheras* with it in his place, he reached his village and bravely fought with Jin Raj Khichi and rescued the cows. Even then a calf was taken away by Khichi. Pabuji again went to fight for it and in that battle he lost his life as a martyr. His wife committed *sati* after him. Raikas believe that by remembering his name, they will have economic prosperity, peace and children. They wear Pabuji lockets, especially while on migration. There is no special day for the worship of Pabuji. He is remembered whenever they feel like it (Kothari 1982). But as a common belief in the community, the most auspicious day to worship Pabuji and to sing prayers in his praise is Saturday.

Temple of Pabuji has two functionaries, the priest and the medium. Anybody who is male, and volunteers to devote himself to the shrine's upkeep can act as a priest. Medium is one who acts as a source of interaction between Pabuji and devotees. Devotees ask questions to the medium and according to their belief he asks Pabuji and answers their queries on his behalf. Priest's duty is to clean the temple every day and to offer *puja*, to all idols in the morning as well as in the evening by waving of lamps, burning of incense sticks, wafting of its smoke over the deity, and offering of coconut and sugar-wafers and then distributing them as *prasad*. His son or any other young boy plays on drums at the time of *puja*. An offering of money, which is called *ugai*, is collected by priests for the shrine. If not used locally, this money is offered to Raikanath temples. The priest may become a medium after some years of devotion at the shrine. But generally the role of priest and medium are assigned to two different men. Spirit of Pabuji descends on the medium. Priests do other jobs. During Pabuji's worship, no sacred litany (*mantra*) or

devotional songs (*arati*) are sung. Mediums in the temple of Pabuji are Kuphauji's vehicles, and they wear silver pendants.

There are a number of events when Pabuji is worshipped. Such events are: When female animals do not conceive for long; She-camel or she-goat or she-sheep is about to deliver a calf; Before inserting a wooden pin (*giviban*) in the camel's nose, and installing the saddle (*plan*) on its back for the first time; at the beginning of the migration; prior to giving ethnoveterinary treatment called 'cauterization'; On the day of shearing of animals; Before leaving for the cattle fair; After a she-animal gives birth, first-milk is offered to Pabuji before making the calf suck it; After cauterization of the sick animal, Raikas scatter bird feed worth four and a quarter rupees (or more) outside Pabu-ji's temple; offering of rice pudding (*khir*) cooked during socio-cultural occasions, like marriage, birth etc. before it is served to guests and family members.

**Ramdeoji:** According to the Raikas, they have started worshipping Ramdeoji for the last 20-25 years. Platforms with stone tablets have been constructed in the hamlets. He is worshipped by persons, living closest to the shrine, for general welfare of the community. However it is believed that if children suffering from warts or moles (a dermatological disorder), circumambulate his platform and scatter bird feed on it, warts will disappear. It is also believed that those suffering from leprosy will get relief from the disease if they visit Ramdeoji's shrine. Ramdeoji is generally a deity of 'Dalits' in Rajasthan. Temples of Ramdeoji have no medium. Ramdeoji's life was centred on the issue of human equality (Humphrey 1991). His popularity among Dalits can be explained primarily by his mission of human equality, and not by miracles associated with his life. He is considered to be a very benevolent deity, who looks after the health, wealth, children and happiness of people. Raikas also believe that recovery from sickness is assured by tying a thread on the wrist of the patient in the name of Ramdeoji and by promising some offering or sacrifice when the patient is fully cured. Some of them are even noted to wear amulets of Ramdeoji seated on a horse. In their houses, a printed photo of Ramdeoji is hung on the wall.

**Bhaironji:** Bhaironji shrines are in Raika hamlets, or somewhere a little distance away from Raika hamlet. If a Raika hamlet does not have a Bhaironji shrine, the people may visit it in the main village or neighbouring hamlet. According to their belief, if a person suffering from ear-ache circumambulates his shrine, he is thought to be relieved of the ache. He is a very popular god in Rajasthan. A tale regarding his origin is given in Shiv Puran. There are two popular names of Bhaironji – Batuk Bhaironji and Kal Bhaironji. The former is said to be the name of his childhood. Batuk-Bhaironji is worshipped at night till 11 p.m. and Kal Bhaironji is worshipped between 11 p.m. to 2 a.m. Usually, he is worshipped at the shrine in or outside the hamlet. A big stone is painted with vermilion and oil and decorated with coloured (preferably with red-coloured) *panni* or metal paper to symbolize the deity. But unlike other communities it has been observed that during worship they don't offer any sacrifice. The deity is offered *urd* (pulse), coconut oil, *churma* (baked flour mixed with sugar), *gulgula*, collyrium etc. A professional Bhopa from the Gujar caste leads the worship. He also chants some *mantras* (magical verses), if any patient is taken to Bhaironji for treatment.

**Sheetala Mata:** Like all other castes of the Hindus, Raikas also worship Sheetla Mata, the goddess of small-pox, in whose honour the festival of Sheel Santon or Basoda is observed in the month of March. Raikas share all the beliefs and observances of the Rajasthani population for the goddess Sheetla. Seven days after Holi, like other Hindu castes, Basoda is observed. No food is cooked on this day, and the goddess is worshipped with stale food and curd. Women worship the goddess with several prayers. It is believed

that the goddess should be pleased, otherwise the children will suffer from smallpox. It is believed that by the grace of Sheetal Mata they will be cured by themselves and as such no treatment is given. In case if a person earns the wrath of Sheetal Mata by not worshipping her properly, it could result in severe sickness and even death to the patient. Several taboos are observed in order to please the goddess till the patient recovers: Not to fry vegetables or pulses in *ghee* or oil; Not to wash one's hair; Not to grind on one's grinding wheel etc. It is also believed that during the time between February to July, which is generally the season of smallpox, children should be made to wear old and torn clothes, so that the goddess will not be attracted towards them.

**Ganeshji or Ganpatiji:** Like Hindus, Raikas regard Ganeshji as the god of all auspicious occasions. They believe that, before initiating any auspicious occasion like marriage, religious session etc. Ganeshji should be remembered foremost otherwise the work or ceremony would be badly interrupted or end up unsuccessfully. Sweets are offered as *prasad* before the god. A crude figure of Ganeshji is drawn either by red ochre or made of clay by elderly woman and then worshipped by all, specially on Wednesdays.

**Hanumanji or Balaji:** Raikas have a great faith in Hanumanji whom they address as Hanuman Baba or Balaji. Like other high caste Hindus, they worship Balaji usually on Tuesdays, when they make offerings of some sweets in the temple. Generally, however, they worship Balaji at their hamlets or camps. It is believed among them that Hanumanji protects his devotees from all evil spirits like *bhut*, *chudail* etc. Usually no songs or rhythmic prayers are addressed to Hanumanji. Popularly, they only say, *jai Hanuman ki* before the idol. A small monkey shaped sketch of the god Hanumanji is drawn with *geru* (red ochre) or vermilion mixed in oil and is worshipped in hamlets or camps and then *prasad* is distributed after offering it to god.

**Shivji:** From among the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses, all Raikas venerate Lord Shiva most. Monday, the day of Shivji, is considered as the most auspicious day. Many of them keep fast on this day. According to a myth about their origin, lord Shiva created them. In the villages so called upper-castes do not let them enter the temple. Therefore, they worship Shivji in their own hamlets or camps. They worship Shivji, by placing a stone as an idol of god, pouring water over it and applying vermilion marks on it. They also perform *aarti* of Shivji. Srivastava in one of his articles says that, the places of penances of various renouces called *dhunis* they visit invariably have Shiva temples. On Mondays, the Raikas observe fast and visit Shiva temples. On ritual occasions, when opium water is prepared for collective consumption, Lord Shiva is invoked. The Raikas of Gujrat worship both Shiva and Parvati. But in Gujarat, the worship of the goddess Parvati has primacy over that of the Lord Shiva (Srivastava 1997).

**Mamaji:** This deity is popular amongst Godwar Raikas. On most ritual occasions, he is worshipped along with Pabuji, and at times even prior to Pabuji. The first milk of she-animal is also offered to Mamaji shrine. According to the local folklore, Mama-ji was a Rajput warrior who came to be thus known because, Mama-ji is a term of address used for Rajput warriors. According to a myth of Raika origin, Rajput warriors are the father and the 'true Raika' (the Samar) as the mother's brother. Mamaji, was a Rajput warrior who died rescuing his subject's cattle. Mamaji platform of worship does not have a roof and his shrine is never enclosed in a temple. Raikas offer clay or wooden horses to Mamaji during *puja*. They also clean the steps of his platform with one's scarf or handkerchief. In contrast to Pabu-ji's worship, it does not have the tradition of displaying any cloth painting or a separate caste of narrators of his life history in musical notes. The origin of Mama-ji is from Mathura or Ujjain. Mamaji is supposed to have travelled from

Ujjain to Malwa. Shikhs have been consulted at places on the way where he halted. No cattle fair or any other *mela* in general is organized at the shrine. Bhairoji is worshipped on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> day of each bright fortnight (Sukla Paksha). The spirit of Mamaji descends on his medium, and his rage may grow to lethal proportions, if he is ignored on the day of his worship.

**Sati Ma:** For Raikas, *sati* is not necessarily a woman who willingly climbs onto her husband's funeral pyre to die. A mother or a woman who sacrifices her life to save the honour of her caste is also seen as Sati Ma. If a case of *sati* occurs anywhere, that place is abandoned. According to their belief, the entire area becomes sacred and thus prohibited for human habitation. A stone tablet is erected at the site where the *sati* was performed. A tank or well is dug there as a mark of respect among some Raika subcastes and the *sati* is regarded as Kuldevi. She is worshipped regularly by the Raika community. The Raikas of Gadhwal remember that there was a case of *sati* in their tenth ascending generation. Hindu-ji's daughter performed *sati* in the village Garbhadesar (Lunkaransar tehsil). After this event, all the Raikas left the village to set up another habitation. They still remember that the *sati's* idol stands near a tank called Hingbarajora, about a mile from Hindu-ji's village. However, no one from Gadhwal visits this place (Srivastava 1997).

**Kuldevi:** Each Raika has a Kuldevi (female goddess of the dynasty). She is seated in the house, and each house has an enclave (in one of the inner rooms of the house). She is not represented in the form of stone or idol. The Bhukus (one of the Raika subcastes) for instance, believe that their Kuldevi is Mummai Mata who hails from Jaisalmer. Each Bhuku house has a place for her in the alcove where pictures of other deities and renouncer teachers are kept. When the members of that household fold their palms before the alcove and offer it ritual ingredients (coconut, sugar-wafers, lamp and incense), they visualize themselves as offering prayers as well as these ingredients to the Kuldevi along with other deities, present or absent in a physical form. Ritual ingredients and salutations are offered in the direction of Jaisalmer (the original abode of Mummai Mata) after pronouncing or mentally remembering her name (Srivastava 1997). Raika families, who have forgotten their Kuldevi have adopted goddesses like Karni Mata or Sheetala Mata or Handa Mata or any other goddess as their Kuldevi. Some Raikas regard Jogmaya (shrine of Durga deity) as their Kuldevi. In the area of this study a goddess called Brahmam Mata is regarded as their Kuldevi and she is worshipped on every 14th day of the moon and during Navratri.

**Purabji:** This deity of Raikas refers to ancestors. Etymologically it is a parochialized form of the Hindu Marwari word *purvaj* (a collective noun for ancestors). Some ancestors even a long time after death may demand to be seated in a proper place and claim worship regularly. Any dead member of the family, even a newborn baby, can place such demand and it is believed that, if such demand is refused it leads to ancestor's wrath. Ancestors place the demand by appearing in dreams of their descendents. Once apotheosized, the ancestor is elevated in status. He now becomes a god, though his foremost demand is to his descent group, he is believed to help all those who seek his help. Once an ancestor becomes Purabji, he is a god and for him all human beings are children. Generally, the Purabji is seated in a small temple, made outside the house in a *baramda* (verandah) and a small idol of *makrana* is kept in it. A snap of the ancestor is also kept in the temple. In some cases, the Purabji, may demand to be seated on the body of his kinsman, who then wear a silver pendant (*chandi ra phul*) in the neck with a picture of Purab-ji embossed on it.<sup>13</sup> In the area of present study, Raikas address Purabji as Bhomyaji as well.

**Mamai Mata:** She is regarded as mute goddess. Everybody can't enter the temple of Mamai Mata. She is propitiated in May-June. Medium men of Mamai Mata in whom she descends can predict the time of rain. Raikas worship the goddess, for the well being of their cattle. Admission to Mamai temple is indeed a privilege. Tambs-Lachys has given one of his experiences in this regard. In his words, "I once tried four hours to impress the Rabaris of Loj-a coastal village near Mangrol - to let me see the 'dumb' goddess. At length, they allowed me a glimpse of her, but against the dark background. I could see very little. It was clear, however, that the caste goddess of the Rebaris is not accessible to just anybody" (Trivedi 1961). In effect, the Mers invite Rebaris to a special rice dinner, 'probably a means of propitiating the dumb goddess, because it is the Rebaris who understand her language and can communicate messages (Mankad 1939). She is believed to be the goddess of Jaisalmer. It is believed that she is mute with anger because her consort left her in favour of meditative practices. It is said that she is goddess Parvati in her angry mood. Mankad writes, "When Lord Shiva went away to practice penance, Parvati did not approve of his going away to take *samadhi* and was determined to remain mute. Her priests are also expected not to speak. They are called Moghas or the mutes". (Mankad, 1939). The Census of India, says, "The goddess which the Rebaris worship is known both as Jogmaya and Mummai i.e. the dumb goddess. Each Rabari village has a sanctified place as a temple for the worship of the goddess. In all the religious ceremonies only the male members of the tribe participate in the function. The tribe has almost an implicit faith in the powers of the goddess and at times of contingency, emergency or illness, they seek protection and help from this source" (Census of India 1961).

**Guru:** Each Raika family has its own *guru*. The head of the household becomes a disciple of, or seeks initiation under a *guru*, and through him, all others in the family accept the reverence of the *guru*. Though the whole family accepts the *guru*, he has a special relationship with the actual disciple. Once accepted, *gurus* are never disowned and dedication to them and their worship continues even after the *guru* dies. Some Raikas, who became disciples of the *guru*, renounced the world of householders to accompany their *guru* in solitude. Thus, they become full-fledged *sadhus*. Other Raikas, although becoming disciples of *guru*, remain householders, but have complete faith in their *guru*. The *guru* gives them *guru-mantra*, which is believed to be a secret and cannot be disclosed even to one's spouse. If the *guru* happens to be around, they make a visit to his place. If a *guru's* abode is somewhere near the village or the place of their campsite during migration, they visit it regularly and volunteer doing some work, like bringing firewood, cleaning the floors, watering the plants, cooking for visitors and so on, as a mark of their respect for the *guru*. Moreover, they do *mannat* of *guru* for the successful completion of any task and if the task is accomplished an offering is made to the *guru*.

**Other Deities:** **Bayan Sa** is believed to be the wife of Ramdeoiji. She is believed to cure stammering as well as problems of infertility. She is also believed to be wandering in the areas lying between Sind and Aravali. **Gudarji Maharaj** (*Gudar* referring to rags used for making pillows and cushions) is worshipped after shearing animals and a lamp is lighted in his honour at the place where bundles of sheared wool are kept. **Jaldevi** is believed to be the goddess of water, inhabiting rivers and ponds. She is supposed to protect them from drowning. **Hand Mata** is regarded as the goddess of camels. **Jhunjar Ji** are those who have shed their blood and have sacrificed their life fighting for the honour of the clan are worshipped as Jhunjarji. Their shrines are located at various places on grazing routes. **Hinglaj Mata's** main temple is believed to be in Balochistan. Raikas worship her in their hamlet. **Tejaji, Bhabuta Siddha and Hareram**

**Dava** are believed to cure victims of snakebite. They are died of snakebite and then they appeared in people's dreams and advised them to remember them in cases of snakebite.

### **Religious Practices during Normal Routine**

Life of Raikas is very hectic, as they are nomads. As young graziers, they hardly have any time to devote to the worship of god. When the herds graze, they relax themselves for sometime which in their local dialect they call *sutavna*. They remember almighty (*bhagwan*) *guru* during such recess. They get some free time only late in the evening, when the animals return. But, this time is mainly spent sleeping and relaxing after the day's tiring journey. During migration, if they happen to hold their camp-site near a field-house (*bera*) where all night devotional singing is arranged, then some of them attend it, while the others look after the herds.

Before the start of a good work, like marriage, or when they buy new animals or start for migration, they go to Raikanath temple, if possible to pay reverence. It is located in village Suap (Osian Tehsil, Jodhpur). Raikas with their herds also circumambulate the temple, if it comes on way during migration. During migration, they pay reverence to the temple of Pabuji, Ramdev Ji aur Mamaji, and so on whatever comes in their way. They also visit the *dhunis* of renouncers during migration, if any occurs on their route or if they happen to pass from anywhere nearby.

### **Worldview**

From the Raika point of view, the divine power is supreme and is placed at the top. Then the priority goes to their caste *panchayats*, *thikana* and *nyaats*. After the divine power, it is the caste *panchayat*, of whom they are afraid most. They believe that they should act according to the high ideals and actions of their ancestors. One shouldn't try to dominate nature, but instead should work harmoniously with it. More or less they are tradition-bound; they believe that if they do not follow the traditions of the community, gods and goddesses will be displeased and they will suffer from illness, barrenness, accidents or death in this world. They are even afraid of receiving more punishments in the next birth. Thus, the deities should be pleased by traditional ritualistic observances in the form of worships, sacrifices, offerings etc. They believe in destiny and say that their problems and challenges are their fate. But, they also believe that a man should always work hard and make an effort to change his fate. They often say '*koi bhi roti muft me nahin deta hai*', meaning thereby that nobody puts bread in your mouth if you are inactive. According to Raikas, a man should lead an austere, honest and traditional life. The following activities are considered to be immoral and sinful by the entire community: Stealing; Not looking after one's family i.e. not earning; Killing a cow, sheep, goat, or camel; To share food or smoking with castes/tribes considered inferior to their community or with members of Muslim community; To make sarcastic remarks about deities or religious practices associated with it; To disobey the decisions or the orders of the caste *panchayat*; To break the rules of class endogamy; and To change the traditional lifestyle of the community i.e. to adopt a trade or profession lower than their traditional occupation of cattle herding. Whether these sins are committed knowingly or unknowingly, the person committing them suffers misfortune and disappointments in this world as well as in the next world. It is believed that after death, the soul of such a person wanders restlessly for sometime and then it goes to hell where it is subjected to several tortures. It takes rebirth in the form of some dirty creature or pack animal like a worm, dog, pig and so on. On the other hand, the soul of a good person is strong. It goes straight to heaven and achieves salvation.

## Religious Duties for the Raikas

Shiva has prescribed certain *dharmas* for Raikas. Rags of Maru Raikas narrate that when the primeval founders of four castes married the celestial nymphs, Shiva announced twenty moral maxims for them. Of these the ten were for Raikas, six for Sutkars, and four for Charans. These rules were essential for Devputra (sons of the god) as each one of them was destined to live after his marriage in the mortal world instead of mount Kailash (the abode of Lord Shiva), and therefore needed to be apprised of how he should lead his life. Shiva advised his sons to live according to their respective maxims if they wanted a happy and glorious life full of prosperity for their future generations. Raikas claim that they have to follow ten *dharmas* and this is the reason why they are also called Dewasi (followers of ten *dharmas*). Their ten *dharmas* are as follows:

1. They should never swear upon Lord Shiva. This may be because they intend to keep their creator away from the oath taking, whether it may be true or false.
2. To be honest and truthful especially in a context with women. Thus, it is said that Raikas never cast a dirty eye on other women.
3. Not to axe, a Banyan tree (*Ficus bengalensis*). This *dharma* is now applied to all trees. According to Raikas, if there is no tree, how will their animals feed? For fuel they depend on dried animal droppings, leaves and grass, rather than on wood.
4. They should worship the Peepal tree (*Ficus religiosa*). The day of worship is not fixed, but it is believed that it can be performed in morning hours of any day of the week. In their folklore Monday is regarded as the most sacred day, because Monday is Shiva's day. On the death of a person, a custom is followed called '*Pipal chokha karna*', on which the tree is worshipped on the 9<sup>th</sup> day following death.
5. Fifth *dharma*, applies to women. In ritual feasts women should eat behind a curtain. According to them, women are shy of eating in the presence of others and since on ritual feasts, they have to eat in a gathering, they hide their face, so that no one except co-shares know about how much they are eating.
6. It is compulsory for married women to wear *ati* (headdress). For the Raikas, the unbounded state of the female body- like unbraided hair, naked arms, legs and neck are regarded as very unsuspecting. *Ati* is a pen-like structure, woven out of sheep hair and covered with cotton thread. It is of six to seven inches of length and one to one and a half inches in diameter with a tapering conical end. On its base are stuck, three or four cotton strings, these strings are tied to the upper end of the plait and thus the *ati* stands on the occiput as a pole. It is a sign of *suhagan*. On the death of a husband, like *chura*, *ati* is also given or discarded on the twelfth day.
7. They should never sell the milk of their animals. It is also a taboo followed in society. Selling milk is considered as selling children. Both camels and sheep are milked twice a day and it is exclusively the duty of male. Only sheep milk can be processed. Processing of camel milk is also a taboo. This is believed to be the order of Pabuji, a Raika deity.
8. They should arrange Shiva's *dhuni*. (renouncer's fire).
9. They should always put up a flag/banner (*jhanda*) of ocher colour.
10. They should observe Monday as the most auspicious day of the week.

The sale of milk is against *dharma*. Sheep milk is for domestic use, and the surplus is processed into clarified butter (*ghee*) by women, like milk, *ghee* is also for household consumption. The person who has performed *mausar* can distribute *ghee* on ritual occasions, which enhances his status in the community. At the time of *mausar* also, *ghee* is used to prepare food. Thus if *ghee* is collected at home, it is used during these occasions. Sheep milk is processed to make curd and *ghee*, but processing camel milk is against *dharma* because however-hard one try, camel milk would never curdle. Moreover, its medicinal value is in consuming it fresh or with minimum boiling. Raika ethno-veterinarians claim that consuming fresh camel milk cures many deadly and incurable diseases. The tree of Pipal is also very important to Raikas. The temples and

platforms dedicated to deities are founded in the neighbourhood or shade of this tree. It is believed that the place where the Pipal stands is sacred and it shouldn't be made impious, otherwise it will result in the wrath of deities. In the absence of a Pipal tree in the hamlet, the Raikas worship Khejri tree. But, Khejri is not said to be the abode of Lord Shiva, instead it is said to be the Tulsi (basal) of Thar desert. About Khejri also there is no gender distinction for worship. Pipal is said to be a male tree while Khejri is supposed to be a female tree.

**Sacred Days:** In every community, certain days are regarded as sacred. Among Raikas Monday is considered as the most sacred day and most of their *puja* takes place on this day. Monday is said to be their day of origin (*utpatti ro din*). Therefore, on this day, they should keep a fast, visit Shiva temple, offer water, flowers and also sometimes Akda (*Calotropis procera*) leaves to the idol of Shiv. They are expected to offer *dan* on this day, like giving alms (*bhiksha*) to the poor. They have to observe certain taboos on these days, namely not to kill a black snake; not to go to search a lost camel; not to give cauterization treatment (*dam dena*) to sick animals (oral medicines can be given); and not to visit the house where a death has occurred. Navratri, (nine days of goddess Durga) are also considered to be very sacred. Raikas keep fast on these days, worship goddess and take bath everyday during this occasion.

### **Enforcement of Dharma**

Raikas themselves know the importance of *dharma* and they themselves remember and follow them. They apply this *dharma* in their daily life and they also explain the logic of these *dharmas*. Moreover, caste councils play a significant role in reinforcing these religious *dharmas*. Raikas are great followers of Lord Shiva. The caste council has no role in enforcing Shiva's *dharmas*. Dharmas related to Shiva are followed devotedly by each Raika. A Raika himself is quite concerned that he and his family members follow Shiva's *dharma*. Even when they are on migration, they follow Shiva's *dharma*. On Monday, the number of Raikas visiting Shiva's temple is the largest. They believe that Shiva is their progenitor, and so they should follow his commands. Moreover, they believe that if they do not follow these *dharmas*, God will be displeased and his wrath will fall on them. More than fear, it is the respect of their deity, which forces them to follow Shiva's *dharma*. Regarding other *dharma*, the *panchayat* takes a decision in enforcing them and it punishes a person who is found guilty of violation. The *dharma* relating to women is enforced very seriously. If a Raika is found violating the norm of restraint on sensuality, he is heavily fined and even ex-communicated. But such cases happen only rarely. Similarly, cutting of trees especially Banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*) is also taken as a serious offense and the guilty is fined heavily and even ex-communicated. A woman, who refuses to wear traditional dress as *ati*, which is very important for *suhagan* (married women) is fined and ex-communicated. Thus, it is seen that the *dharmas* are faithfully followed by Raikas and the caste council helps in reinforcing them when any violation occurs. Well, nowadays certain changes have also been observed. For example, the *dharma* of eating behind the curtain is disappearing day by day. Raics say that flag (*jhandi*) of ochre colour should be fixed on the top of the hut (*jhunpa*) or in its animal enclosure (*bada*) and on a *dang* in the case of migratory herds. But this practice is also diminishing day by day.

Srinivas, has distinguished the deities which a community shared with Hindus all over India from those that are restricted locally. The first kind was called Sanskritic, as they derive their legitimacy from scriptures written in Sanskrit and constituted what Srinivas called, 'All-India-Hinduism'. The deities of the second category are termed as non-Sanskritic. They are a product of local conditions serving local needs (Srinivas 1952). Lord Shiva is a Sanskritic deity and other deities in which Raikas believe are non-Sanskritic deities. The non-Sanskritic deities or local or folk deities are more intermixed in their daily lives, like they bow before Pabuji, before going for migration, they bow before the alcove of deities like Jhunjhar-ji on their grazing routes, they held night sessions of devotional oral singing of Pabuji, whenever they feel like or whenever they can afford money wise or time wise (Srivastava 2000).

## Conclusion

By taking a glimpse over the religious practices, it can be well assumed that Raikas like other Hindu communities have a faith in a number of deities and as such it is a multi-pantheon community. Though, their main religious faith is centered around Lord Shiva, who is their originator and have also given ten *dharmas* to them to follow, they in no manner have less faith in other deities like Gogaji, Pabuji, Ramdeoji, Bhaironji, Mamaji and so on. One more important thing can be noted with regard to the religion of Raikas is that there is no hierarchy among their deities. Though their main deity is Lord Shiva and they also consider Monday, the day of Lord Shiva, as the most auspicious day, but yet other deities have their own particular areas of influence and no overlapping is observed in these areas. Like, regarding the ailments of camels, they worship Pabuji, regarding small-pox Sheetla Mata is worshipped, after shearing Gudar-ji-Maharaj is worshipped and so on. The greatest characteristic of Raika religion is that it is very tolerant and liberal. It leads them to act in the right direction. Besides their local deities, it allows them to worship all Hindu gods and goddesses. Though they are nomadic, they haven't cut themselves off from religious beliefs and rituals followed traditionally.

## References

- Agarwal, Govind. 1964. "Pabu-Ji Rathore". *Maru Bharti* X1(1): pp.26-28
- Census of India*. 1961. Monograph on Village Pacchatardi in Gujarat, p.8.
- Christoph, Von Furer-Haimendorf. 1962. "Moral Concepts" in *Three Himalayan Societies in Indian Anthropology*, ed. by T. N. Madan and Gopala Sarana. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, p.279.
- Crooke, William. 1975[1896]. *The Tribes and Castes of the North-West Provinces and Oudh*, Calcutta: Office of Superintendent of Government (1920[1829,1832]) Printing, Reprinted by Delhi: Cosmo Publications, pp.201-203
- Grafton, Thomas, Hancock. 1945."Religious Origins and Sociological Theory". *American Sociological Review* Vol. December, p.727.
- Honigman. 1963. *Understanding Culture*. New York: Harper and Row, pp.190.
- Humphrey, Caroline. 1991. "Fairs and Miracles: At the Boundaries of the Jain Community in Rajasthan". in Michael Carrithers and Caroline Humphrey (eds.), *The Assembly of Listeners, Jains in Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 201-25.
- Komal. 1982.*The Shrine: An Expression of Social Needs in Gods of Byways: Wayside Shrines of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, pp.4-31.
- Lachye, Tambs, H. (1997). *Power, Profit and Poetry: Traditional Society in Kathiawar, Western India*, Delhi: Manohar, pp.168-171.
- Mankad, B.L. 1939. "Raikas of Kathiawad -A Social Study". *Journal of the University of Bombay* (7): 31 - 71.
- Pokarna, K.L. 1994. *Social Beliefs, Cultural Practices in Health and Disease*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, pp.9-15.

- Gunnar, H.V. 1952. *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Srivastava, Vinay. 1997. *Religious Renunciation of a Pastoral People*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, p.67.
- ..... 1999. "Some Characteristics of a 'Herding Caste' of Rajasthan". *Human Ecology*, Special Issue No. 7, pp. 303- 319.
- ..... 2000. "Social Anthropology of Pastoral Nomads: The Raika Jati and its Dharmic order" in M. K. Bhasin (ed.) *Studies on Man, Issues and Challenges*, Delhi: KRE.
- Trivedi. 1961. "The Maldharis: The Pastoralists of Saurashtra" p.20 in *Power, Profit-and Poetry: Traditional Society in Kathiawar Western India* Edited by Tambs-Lachye. Delhi: Manohar.

---

**Pragya Sharma**, Senior Assistant Professor, IIS (deemed to be) University, Jaipur.  
Email: [pragya.sharma@iisuniv.ac.in](mailto:pragya.sharma@iisuniv.ac.in)

---